

# Bangor Daily News

BANGOR DAILY NEWS • FRIDAY, MAY 25, 2001

OpEd

## Missile defense: shields vs. swords

By Tom Allen

**P**resident George W. Bush has announced that he intends to move forward quickly with development of a national missile defense (NMD). He has offered no specifics on his plan, no cost estimates, and has not included any provision for NMD in his budget. Yet, before we allocate any more money for this project, we need answers to these questions:

Can missile defense technology be proven to work reliably and consistently? Is NMD a proportional response to a credible threat? Will the system improve our overall national security? What are its costs, and how will it be paid for?

Here's what we know so far. Hitting a missile with a missile poses enormous, perhaps insurmountable, technological challenges, including the task of distinguishing decoys from warheads. The president would invest in this new system despite

repeated test failures. He also wants to speed up deployment of an interim ship-based system, thus skipping essential testing.

We know that even if this shield works, it would be full of holes. NMD is intended to detect, intercept and destroy isolated ballistic missiles fired by accident or by "rogue" nations before they hit their target. The system would be defenseless against cheaper, untraceable and more likely non-missile ways to deliver weapons of mass destruction by these same enemies. A recent Mike Peters cartoon mocks this fatal flaw: "This system," a general says to an aghast Mr. Bush, "is guaranteed to stop anything except, of course, some wacko with a nuke in a Ryder truck."

Moreover, like any shield, NMD will encourage the building of more swords. Our allies rightly fear missile defense will provoke a renewed race to develop offensive arms that can overcome the system.

The administration's plan, to abrogate the Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty first and come up with details of a missile shield second, is the most antagonistic of all possible approaches with Russia. Instead, we should negotiate changes to the ABM Treaty with Russia. Unilateralism and abandonment of arms control through multilateral, verifiable treaties will undermine the very stability and security NMD purports to enhance.

Finally, and of most immediate concern, we know that the NMD's staggering cost inevitably would drain

funds from other programs. Particularly vulnerable are other military projects. With rumors that the DD-21 program may be shelved, and an expected Navy budget that cuts DDG-51 procurement, New England shipyard workers may soon feel the effects of this crusade for missile defense. Indeed, as the president's massive tax cuts take effect, deficit spending or painful cuts in existing domestic programs may also be necessary to pay for missile defense.

When President Clinton advocated a limited NMD, I voiced similar concerns. I am now more skeptical of the wisdom of proceeding, particularly on the hasty timetable the president has suggested.

President Bush has embraced a more ambitious proposal, which swells NMD's estimated cost from \$60 billion, for a ground-based system, to at least \$100 billion, for one that adds sea- and space-based components. These funds are not in the president's own 10-year budget. It is irresponsible for the administration to ask Americans to invest in a concept without being forthright about its costs to taxpayers.

I want to know why at the same time President Bush is urging missile defense aimed at "rogue" nations, he has terminated negotiations to end



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each nation. The administration began talks with North Korea after that nation agreed to release the remains of the two American soldiers who were killed in the Korean War. The administration also agreed to meet with North Korea to discuss the issue of the missing soldiers. For that reason, the administration has a Special Representative for North Korea in the United States. That office was created with a view to the North Korean program of nuclear weapons exports of nuclear weapons. The administration has also proposed to require the provision of financial contributions to the defense from those states and the nation has the right to benefit from that. As the administration tries to deal with the nuclear weapons system that does not exist, the United States should be that they will have to be the nuclear. The nuclear policy announced by President Bush appears to be based on ideological doctrine rather than a security assessment. Let's debate the scope and shape of a nuclear missile defense before we treat the approach as a keystone for decades.

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